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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAN/PALESTINE/UAE FTA/REFORM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

1. SUMMARY: A columnist in "Al-Bayan" cautions the use of military force against Iran. An editorial in "Al-Khaleej" says it is disgraceful for the U.S. to provide Israel with Weapons of Mass Destruction while preventing the Arabs from providing the Palestinians with basic support. A UAE columnist in "Al-Khaleej" advises the Arab countries to be cautious about Iran's quest for nuclear power and not get deceived by Iran's promises. Most Arabic and English newspaper carried a wire story on Sheikha Lubna's hope for a signed U.S. trade deal by the end of 2006. "Al-Bayan" carried an almost full-page exclusive interview with George Mitchell, former U.S. Senator on issues of Iran, Israel and Guantanamo. A female columnist in "Akhbar Al-Arab" criticized American projects for reform in the Middle East. End Summary.

2. Under the headline "Are direct negotiations a way out?", a columnist, Dr. Naseef Hatta, wrote in Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan," (circulation 90,000) 5/14:

"The military solution should be ruled out because it cannot help change the Iranian standpoint. The military solution could drive them towards the nuclear power option and exposes the region to the hazards of a comprehensive bombing campaign in the Middle East... Iran's role in the region needs to be recognized by the U.S."

3. Under headline "Disgrace", Sharjah-based pan-Arab daily "Al-Khaleej" (circulation 85,000) wrote 5/14 unsigned editorial:

"Arabs throughout the decades have always lost because they depended on America. America, which cannot be on their side, not even 1%, in any issue that might annoy Israel since their strategies are set on siding with Israel against the Arabs, while spending billions of dollars, crossing seas and oceans and waging wars for Israel... The U.S. provides the Zionist Entity with Weapons of Mass Destruction, weapons of terror and destruction while stopping Arabs from providing Palestinians with what supports them to live. This is disgraceful."

4. Under headline "So that we do not get deceived", Dr. Mohamed Bin Huwaiden, a UAE columnist, wrote 5/14 op-ed in Sharjah-based pan-Arab daily "Al-Khaleej" (circulation 85,000):

"Iran is trying hard during this period to stir up its diplomats targeting neighboring countries, especially in the Arab Gulf region, in an attempt to convince these countries that Tehran has no intention to develop military nuclear power... Iran today is closer to the control and domination of the Gulf region through its military power, thereby, increasing the gap between itself and other countries especially Saudi Arabia and Iraq so as to ensure that there is no country in the region that can threaten Iran in the future... As long as Iran is operating under such a regime... all probabilities show that despite Iran's continuous assertions, it will keep trying to develop nuclear weapons. This is obvious, especially because of Iran's perseverance in having the right to fertilize uranium on its land even in small quantities. Therefore, so that we do not get deceived by Iran's promises, we need to seriously contemplate the future with an emotionless perspective or standpoint that is not based on speculations, so as to properly face such a future."

5. Most local Arabic and English newspapers carried a 5/15 wire story article on UAE Economic Minister Sheikha Lubna al-Qassimi stating that she hoped for a completed U.S. trade deal by the end of 2006. She said that she expected the fifth round of talks to begin before the end of summer and a deal to be signed by the end of the year. She also declined to comment on media reports that said Washington was pressing the UAE to open up its heavily protected telecommunications sector before the 2015 deadline set by the World Trade Organization.

6. Under headline "Mitchell regards hitting Iran as unlikely and demands Israel to stop building settlements", Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan," (circulation 90,000) carried an exclusive full-page interview with former U.S. Senator George

Mitchell on 5/15:

"Americans themselves will decide who to hold responsible for the thousands of mistakes committed in Iraq as previously stated by Secretary Condoleezza Rice... And whether I agree or not with

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the latest policies practiced in Iraq, we need to deal with the reality that we are living in and have everybody focus on how to resolve these issues in Iraq."

"I still believe that setting up an economic embargo, which was imposed on Saddam Hussein's regime and applied by the UN and the U.S., is the best and the most correct policy to practice. However this was implemented in a weak form by the U.S. administration."

"Iran is not like Iraq, and the U.S. and European policies toward Iraq differ from those directed toward Iran. Washington follows a diplomatic line in dealing with the Iranian portfolio as is done with the North Korean one."

"I do not believe that the U.S. will take a military action against Iran, but the people in charge of the Iranian nuclear case should work harder to help the diplomatic efforts succeed. The U.S. also asserted that it would use all options including military action, but I believe that Washington will more likely choose the diplomatic option..."

"It is expected that Iran, having a strong influence in Iraq, to react against the U.S. through Iraq if the U.S. ever strikes Iran..."

17. Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan," (circulation 90,000) also carried a short interview with the former U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen, 5/15:

"The number of U.S. soldiers involved with human rights violations is very limited; we have condemned such acts... My friend Senator John Mekan is pressing on the Congress to establish laws prohibiting the use of torture as a way of extracting confessions."

"The U.S. Congress should press the American government to provide prisoners with a living environment complying with international human rights and I believe that the Guantanamo detainees should be taken to court... I think this will happen and these prisoners in Guantanamo will be put on trial through military courts."

18. Under headline "U.S. reform project in the Middle East", a female columnist, Marwa Krediya, wrote in a 5/15 op-ed in Abu Dhabi-based pan-Arab daily "Akhbar Al-Arab" (circulation 20,000):

"Although the U.S. is spending enormous amounts of money to conduct social and economic studies in order to understand the community structure of the Middle Eastern societies, it still fails to understand the truth of such nations, especially when you hear the clear statements made by its leaders... Accordingly, I say this to those in charge of the Western cultural projects: The intellectual proposals that are introduced to the nations, regardless of its contents, will not receive an effective acceptance and will not cause radical changes for two main reasons: First, the absence of credibility from the side that is proposing such ideas... Second, these proposals are not based on the symbolic elements of these nations. The U.S. administration imposes the symbols of its own culture on societies wherever it finds symbols that it does not like. For instance, how can I ask a tribal-based community to hold elections and have everybody participate, when such a community has its own unique structure which is resistant to outside intervention?"

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